

State of the City Address
Mayor James E. Smith
City of Helena, Montana
January 25, 2016

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to our meeting tonight and to the annual State of the City Address. The City Charter is very clear about the assignment:

“The mayor shall communicate to the city commission and to the general public a statement of the affairs of the city, each January, and may make recommendations regarding these matters.”

The annual state of the city address presents an opportunity for us to look back, to look ahead and to look around; and we plan to do a little of each tonight.

I am very pleased to be able to say for the 15th consecutive year the state of the city is good. The Preamble to our City Charter begins with this precious statement:

“Helena, Montana is the proud seat of our state government. It is a community with a colorful past and a vibrant future. There is an openness and basic decency that beckons each of our citizens to contribute to its unique identity.”

The openness and decency that existed here in 1976, when our City Charter was adopted, still animates the people of Helena; and they are still contributing to our city’s unique identity. Consequently, in 2016, Helena is well governed, well managed, well-staffed and well supported.

Helena is well governed by a diverse, hard-working city commission. I would like to begin by congratulating Commissioners Farris-Olsen and Noonan on their election to the Helena City Commission. I also want to recognize and thank Commissioners Ellison and Haladay for their continued service to the citizens. The five of us do our best to lead and serve you every year; working together for the people of Helena. I can assure you that we take our governance

role seriously, and that we are deeply committed to this community and to the people of Helena.

Commissioners Elsaesser and Haque-Hausrath chose not to run for re-election in 2015; however, I want to recognize and thank them for their service on the City Commission.

The city is well supported. There are close to three hundred (300) citizens serving on advisory boards, authorities and other standing or ad hoc committees. All of these people are volunteers. They give freely of their time and expertise in order to make Helena a better place to live. I can't thank them all properly or often enough for their great contributions.

In particular I'd like to recognize the members of the Helena Citizens Council (HCC). The HCC has become an increasingly important and effective body to city government.

The city is well managed. Our City Manager, Ron Alles, and the department directors are an outstanding group of professionals, working together as a management team to produce positive outcomes and good results for the people of Helena on a daily basis.

The city is well staffed. In 2015, I had the opportunity to visit every department/division within the city organization and can assure you, our employees are well trained, well equipped, well led, and that they are committed to excellence in the performance of their jobs.

Our employees are our highest priority; we recognize that as best we can from year to year by investing in them with the funding available to us through taxes, fees and assessments. Their work is measured by the quality of services they deliver every day to the citizens of Helena.

We're very deliberate and careful when it comes to increasing taxes, fees and assessments. We're careful in good times; and we've been especially careful the last few years.

Our ability to compensate our employees from year to year depends first and foremost on property tax revenues, and upon the fees and assessments paid by our citizens. The Commission did not approve a Cost of Living Adjustment for

city employees for FY16. It's a classic balancing act. It really captures the dynamic tension that exists between government and the private sector of the economy.

At the same time, Helena is a government town, no doubt about it. It's also true that Helena has a vital and vibrant private sector. The valuation of commercial and residential building permits issued in 2015 was over \$102 million. The city is very committed to supporting the private sector and providing economic re-investment in the community.

The City along with Lewis & Clark County approved two requests for tax abatements in 2015; one for the Stone Tree Climbing Center, LLC and one for Pioneer Aerostructures. Both of these businesses look forward to the future and making more investments in the Helena Community.

The City of Helena is also very fortunate to have many non-profits who provide essential services that enhance the quality of life for many of our vulnerable citizens.

Our responsibility to the taxpayers is to operate within our means through prioritization and budgeting. It is the commission's hope and expectation that we can maintain the present level of service to our citizens in 2016.

The city's day to day work is very, very important. This means delivering essential services to the people of Helena: purifying water, treating wastewater, picking up the garbage, patrolling the community, capturing stray, lost or abandoned animals, maintaining the parks, responding to service calls, plowing the streets, and fixing the potholes.

Looking back, I do believe 2015 was a year of accomplishments, and I'll highlight a few from each City Department. This is just a sampling, the tip of the accomplishment iceberg, so to speak:

Administrative Services Department

- ❖ Received the 27th consecutive Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting.
- ❖ Obtained a "Clean" Annual Audit for FY 2015.
- ❖ Maintained services with a balanced, sustainable budget.

City Attorney

- ❖ Continued to fulfill our role in the city's law enforcement and public safety mission, along with the Helena Police Department and Helena Municipal Court.
- ❖ Prosecuted 2,461 total citations and obtained a conviction on 91% (115 out of 126 totals) of citations for driving under the influence of alcohol/drugs.
- ❖ Involved in water rights adjudication for City's Ten Mile Creek water rights.
- ❖ Continued to provide legal support to all city departments; including the curbside recycling program, renewable energy loan program, Centennial Trail construction, sidewalk snow removal ordinance, Mount Ascension open space and Parks Maintenance facility acquisitions.
- ❖ Represented the city in two Human Rights Cases filed by Montana Independent Living Project.
- ❖ Coordinated the preparation of the *Amicus Curiae* Brief with DNRC (permitting exempt well litigation.)

Community Development

Building Division

- ❖ Commercial development project valuations for 2015 were \$68,875,402 and residential development project valuations were \$33,943,673.
- ❖ Issued building permits for 72 new single family buildings; 15 duplexes; and 16 multi-family dwellings.
- ❖ Worked on the creation and implementation of the renewable energy loan program.

Planning Division

- ❖ Brought forward 16 resolutions of intention for annexation, this included the wholly surrounded West Side Phase I; three resolutions for conditional use permits, two final plats for major subdivisions; eight ordinances to pre-zone and three zone changes.
- ❖ Worked with HOME and CDBG grants for Ron's Place (Westmont); assisted with and/or was awarded the following grants: Big Sky Trust Fund Pioneer Aerostructures Employment Grant; Big Sky Trust Fund Planning Grant

for the development of the Railroad Urban Renewal District; and the Big Sky Trust Fund Planning Grant for the Downtown Master Plan.

- ❖ Worked on the formation of the Railroad Urban Renewal district
- ❖ Worked with the consultant in development of updated ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan.

Community Facilities

- ❖ Remodeled upper exits from Civic Center Auditorium.
- ❖ Re-commissioned Main Fire Station heating and air handling system.
- ❖ Installed energy efficient lighting at the Utilities Division.
- ❖ Installed LED lighting upgrade for the City-County Building parking lot.
- ❖ Assisted with the purchase of Lehrkinds property for Parks Maintenance Division.

Helena Fire Department

- ❖ Responded to 4119 calls for service (up 8% from 2014) from the 911 system.
- ❖ Conducted 579 fire and life safety inspections; 150 new construction inspections; reviewed 223 building plans and presented 42 public education presentations.
- ❖ Successfully applied for a grant totaling \$409,000 from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program to assist in the replacement of aging Fire Apparatus, which led to the acquisition of two new front line fire engines.
- ❖ Continued to maintain and train a confined space rescue team to support the City's Public Works Department. Maintained and trained a Hazardous Materials Technician level team with the assistance of Montana Disaster and Emergency Services.
- ❖ Continued to develop and expand the Helena Interagency Fire Investigation Team in conjunction with the Helena Police Department.
- ❖ Worked with the TriCounty FireSafe Working Group to update the area's Community Wildfire Protection Plan. This ensures that mitigation work continues

in Lewis and Clark, Jefferson and Broadwater Counties to prevent and/or reduce the effects of a wildfire in the greater Helena area.

- ❖ Fire Chief Mark Emert was hired in December following the retirement of Chief Sean Logan.

Helena Parking Commission

- ❖ Improved public safety with the installation of 21 surveillance cameras in the 6th Avenue and Getchell parking garages.
- ❖ Installed automated parking equipment in Parking Lot #3 on Jackson Street.
- ❖ Added parking friendly signage in all parking lots.
- ❖ Refurbished all 250 parking meters and poles within the parking district.
- ❖ Issued over 3,000 parking permits.

Human Resources

- ❖ Continued the city's reputation of being an employer of choice in the Helena area by hiring 32 new employees over the past year. This was a 45% increase over the prior year's number of new hires. Two of the new hires include the positions of Administrative Services Director and Fire Chief.
- ❖ Wrapped up the city's open labor agreement with the Fire Department
- ❖ Shifted the City Wellness Screening Program 's focus and offered incentives for employees who improved their cholesterol, blood pressure, blood glucose levels, BMI and were able to quit using tobacco.

Municipal Court

- ❖ Implemented Digiticket which enables police officers to quickly create and submit tickets electronically; this benefits Municipal Court by increasing the are efficiency of ticket entry in the FullCourt management system.
- ❖ Completed implementation of the Debt Recovery System offered through the Montana State Department of Revenue.
- ❖ Processed 653 civil cases.

Parks and Recreation

Parks Administration

- ❖ Experienced an increase in park use reservations and revenues. Generated \$13,970 in park use fees (an increase of \$5,356 from 2014).
- ❖ Transitioned Contracts/Use Agreements onto the city share drive in an effort to provide all departments easy access to copies of their specific contracts.
- ❖ Development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for Parks Administration.
- ❖ Worked with Community Facilities Director to secure the purchase of Lehrkinds property for a new park maintenance and police evidence-storage building.

Parks:

- ❖ Replaced outdated playground equipment with a new playground at Waukesha Park.
- ❖ Continued to work with community volunteers and partners in the construction of the 6th Ward Garden Park.
- ❖ Assisted consultants with the completion of ADA audits of parks and parks facilities.
- ❖ Conducted playground safety audits; replaced wood chips with engineered wood fiber at three playgrounds.
- ❖ Completed improvements to the Centennial Park dog park including landscaping, spigot area and added decomposed granite.

Open Lands:

- ❖ Constructed nearly one-mile of new recreational trails.
- ❖ Improved over two-miles of existing recreational trails.
- ❖ Upgraded location and informational signage throughout the open lands system.
- ❖ Installed an ADA compliant, double vaulted restroom facility at the Mount Helena Trailhead parking area.
- ❖ Completed 62-acres of forest fuel reduction treatment.

Recreation:

- ❖ Received the Lewis & Clark County Health Departments Gold Buoy Awards for outstanding management and operations of the pool, waterpark and splash deck.
- ❖ Co-hosted the first ever All Women's Triathlon, in partnership with local USA Triathlon.
- ❖ Provided logistical support for the Montana Senior Olympics.

Golf Course:

- ❖ Completed the construction of an illuminated golf course sign and surrounding landscape to better identify the course entrance.
- ❖ Re-landscaped the pro shop and clubhouse improving the appearance and appeal.
- ❖ Re-stained the pro shop exterior and installed a new front entry door.
- ❖ Increased golf merchandise sales by \$25,000 and concessions revenues by \$28,500.
- ❖ Increased winter league participation from 30 to 40 teams.

Urban Forestry:

- ❖ Planted 67 trees, removed 44 trees and pruned over 540 city-owned trees.
- ❖ Responded to two major wind events and assisted police and fire departments with numerous calls related to downed city trees and branches.
- ❖ Continued to update and manage urban tree inventory.
- ❖ Developed an Emerald Ash Borer preparedness plan and began monitoring.

Weed Control:

- ❖ Treated weeds on approximately 546 acres of city property.
- ❖ Pulled 2,000 pounds of weeds.
- ❖ Processed 190 nuisance vegetation complaints (153 noxious weed).

Police Department

- ❖ Made crime mapping accessible to the community through a company named *Raids on Line*, which is available through the city and county websites.

- ❖ Instituted a more personal and comprehensive daily electronic press update to the local media and created a Helena Police Department Facebook page, which has provided more communication to citizens and more updates on day to day operations and efforts of the Police Department.
- ❖ Added another K9 to the Police Department; the dog specializes in explosive and illegal drug searches.
- ❖ Continued developing the Police Department's volunteer program, which now has over 30 citizen participants. They assist the Department in numerous areas including evidence, pawn, monitoring open space, handicap parking enforcement, traffic control and abandoned vehicles.
- ❖ Continued to make DUI arrests a very important aspect of traffic enforcement. DUI arrests for the Department (and county wide) are at their highest number in years.

Public Works

Engineering

- ❖ Installed the Ten-Mile Clearwell Cover and Liner; saving \$100,000 and 300,000 of gallons of water per day.
- ❖ Completed the Long Term Transportation Plan.
- ❖ Completed Phase 1 of Centennial Trail.
- ❖ Completed the Helena Industries and 6th Ward Park CTEP Project.
- ❖ Performed 110 final building inspections and 108 building review approvals.
- ❖ Implemented the new Sidewalk Snow Removal Ordinance.

HATS

- ❖ Developed a new fixed two-route system that will serve the Westside of Helena.
- ❖ Implemented an ADA Para-Transit Ride Notification software program.
- ❖ Installed on-board camera systems in all front line buses.
- ❖ Operated the Capital Commuter Legislative Shuttle for the 2015 Legislative Session.

- ❖ Received its first indigo blue bus.
- ❖ Provided the following rides:
 - 56,174 rides for checkpoint and Curb to Curb (Para-transit)
 - 19,351 rides for East Valley
 - 9,924 rides on the capital shuttle

Solid Waste

- ❖ Completed Transfer Station fencing project (Benton Ave to Transfer Station Rails to Trails). This puts the Transfer Station in compliance with DEQ regulations.
- ❖ Replaced Grizzly Compactor Crane.
- ❖ Transitioned separated plastics #1 & #2 to co-mingled mixed #1 & #2 plastics.
- ❖ Purchased and installed two self-contained compactor roll-offs for plastics
- ❖ Implemented change to e-waste recycling by allowing daily drop-off vs. one day per month drop off.

Streets

- ❖ Completed the mill and overlay of Helena Avenue from Neil Avenue to the Railroad Station, 2,200 tons of asphalt.
- ❖ Chip sealed 221,500 square yards, which is equivalent to 10 miles of street, 36 feet wide.

Wastewater

- ❖ Engineered new screening equipment for the entrance works.
- ❖ Further optimization of the facility.

Water

- ❖ Completed Tenmile Watershed fuel mitigation projects.

The above lists include a fraction of what the city employees accomplished in 2015. They are hard workers and true professionals in every sense of the word. They are also good community members.

I want to recognize and thank all the city employees who give their personal time and energy to our community by supporting and participating in

many charitable fundraising events: United Way of the Helena Area, Relay for Life, the annual Christmas Family Adoption, Food Share Drive, the Special Olympics Torch Run, the Fire Department's Fill the Boot Drive, the Angel Fund and Rocky Mountain Development Council's Spirit of Service Day. Our staff truly understands the meaning of community.

I can assure the citizens that while the city commission is considering and adopting policies, resolutions and ordinances; city employees continue to provide day-to-day essential services.

The city of Helena has many partners we work with, including the Helena Regional Airport Authority, Helena Housing Authority, Rocky Mountain Development Council (RMDC), YWCA, Helena Food Share, the Forest Service, Montana Department of Transportation, Department of Environmental Quality, and Prickly Pear Land Trust, just to name a few.

The City of Helena continues its relationship with the Commander and crew of the USS Helena (725). I was honored to attend the Change of Command for Commander Lamphear in June of 2015 in Norfolk Virginia. I also met and extended a warm welcome to Commander Pitman.

The First Special Service Force (FSSF) Association was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal on February 7, 2015 in Washington, D.C. and held their annual reunion August 19-22, 2015 in Helena.

And while we look back at last year's accomplishments, we must also plan for the future. Looking ahead, 2016 promises to be another busy year. At the direction of City Manager Alles, city staff will complete and implement the following:

- ❖ ADA Transition Plan
- ❖ Railroad TIF District
- ❖ Remodel the Parks Maintenance Building
- ❖ Installation of additional energy efficient lighting at the Utilities Division offices
- ❖ Monitor and improve the curb-side recycling program
- ❖ Complete the construction of Centennial Trail West

- ❖ Improve lighting energy and efficiency in our parking garages
- ❖ Development of the 6th Ward Garden Park
- ❖ Continue to implement forest fuels mitigation strategy and priorities as identified in the Helena Open Lands Management Plan
- ❖ Identify golf course building improvements and priorities
- ❖ Upgrade of voice Print at Dispatch Center
- ❖ Upgrade of call back system at SSD
- ❖ Continue to work with various entities in the community on active shooter training and preparedness and how to deal with aggressive individuals
- ❖ Adopt a balanced budget for FY 2017

We've got a lot to do together this year in Helena. But, I go right back to the City Charter. I believe that the openness and basic decency that characterizes Helena continues to beckon each of our citizens to continue to contribute to its unique identity. So, I know we'll get the help we need, and that knowledge is a great source of strength and comfort.

Thank you all. It is an honor to serve you, and I welcome the opportunities and challenges 2016 will bring.